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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: MISSILE DEFENSE, IRAN, MIDEAST,  
AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, ECB

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- [1](#)1. Lead Stories Summary

Editorials focused on the ruling of an Austrian court against the Minister President of Thuringia, Dieter Althaus (CDU), the ruling of the Constitutional Court on electoral voting machines, and President Obama's rapprochement with Russia. Headlines in the press centered on the Althaus case. ZDF-TV's early evening newscast Heute and ARD-TV's early evening newscast Tagesschau opened with reports on Althaus.

- [1](#)2. U.S.-Russian Relations, Iran

Under the headline "Washington takes Moscow seriously," S|ddeutsche Zeitung comments: "The U.S. President does not simply throw out problems left by his predecessor. He exploits the missile defense shield... as a means to exert pressure on Moscow..... If we are not mistaken, Obama's first steps in foreign policy make clear that the new U.S. government will not be shy in pursuing its policy in the world. It knows about the powerful tools it has and indicates that it plans to use them."

Frankfurter Allgemeine opines that "the Great Bargain" between Washington and Moscow, in which the U.S. would abandon its missile defense project if Russia helps Washington prevent Iran from building a nuclear weapon "sounds plausible but is in reality complicated" because "as long as negotiations take place in the framework of the UN, the Chinese have a say as well and will not allow Washington and Moscow to outvote them. America must also take its allies in Europe into consideration, particularly Poland and the Czech Republic, which have decided in favor of the deployment against enormous opposition. This is all about the reliability of Washington's promises."

FT Deutschland describes "the offer to Russian President Medvedev as

a smart move because it puts the ball in the Kremlin's court. Obama's message is that if it is possible to prevent Iran from building a nuclear bomb, then missile defense, which is unpopular in Moscow, would no longer be necessary. To reach this goal, Russia can contribute a great deal. By this move, the new U.S. government kills several birds with one stone. It says goodbye to a project that has never been dear to the Democrats. The shield is expensive and it has never been clear whether it technically works. Obama also weakens the criticism of the Russians.... The U.S. President turns the table: Americans are no longer a threat to the security in Europe, but it is up to Russia to contribute something to the world's security. Obama's proposal helps to focus on America's greatest foreign political problem: Iran's nuclear armament."

Handelsblatt's front-page editorial notes: "Has the building of a missile defense shield so close to Russia ever been a good idea? Probably not. Technically, it is dubious, and politically, it stirred up many bad feelings. The cost-benefits ratio has never been in balance. The fact that the U.S. President now rectifies this wrong policy is right. But: Is it realistic to hope in return for Russian cooperation in the dispute with Iran? Probably not.... Abandoning the missile project will not suffice. Obama will have to put a few more ideas on the table before the NATO summit in April."

### 13. Clinton Trip to Mideast

All media reported on Secretary of State Clinton's visit to Jerusalem, where she underscored the goal of a two-state solution. ARD-TV's Tagesschau stated that "she wanted to explore chances for creating peace in the Middle East," while many conservative parties currently in negotiations over forging a new Israeli government have so far rejected U.S. calls for a two-state solution. The newscast quoted her as saying: "During the conference, I emphasized President Obama's and my commitment to working to achieve a two-state solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians."

Frankfurter Allgemeine reported that "Secretary of State Clinton announced in Jerusalem on Tuesday that her government would send two envoys to Damascus for talks. The representatives of the State Department and the White House are supposed to clarify bilateral topics, Clinton said during her first visit to Israel."

### 14. U.S.-Cuban Relations

Under the headline: "Little Brother Steps Out Of Big Brother's Shadow," Sueddeutsche reported; "Cuba's President Ral Castro is depriving Foreign Minister Prez Roque and economic reformer Lage - and further loyal supporters of Fidel - of their power. This can be interpreted as an indication that 77-year-old Ral Castro is breaking with the legacy of seriously-ill Fidel Castro to expand his own power base. The former German Ambassador to Cuba, Bernd Wulffen, an expert on domestic political life in Cuba said: 'This firing of leading Fidelistas is a revolt against the image of the little brother.' Wulffen thinks that the reshuffle is an indication that Ral Castro wants to initiate economic reforms, for instance, a restructuring of the currency and subsidy system."

FAZ reported under the headline: "No Use For The Men Of The Future" that "Ral Castro struck, and replaced his brother's followers with officers who are loyal to him. With this team, he wants to defy the crisis - and Obama's attempts to open up the country. The Cuban president is really interested in removing all bureaucratic obstacles for economic activities. But the main thing is that Ral has now surrounded himself with loyal supporters at all levels of government. But it remains open what his future goals are, while Barack Obama is likely to prepare a softening of the U.S. embargo policy towards Cuba."

Sueddeutsche wondered: "What could this government reshuffle mean? Possibly two things: On the one hand, Ral Castro is trying to show some promise as a reformer...but, on the other hand, economic liberties only sluggishly reach the people, while political liberties do not reach them at all. Ral Castro is still no Gorbachev. But some day in the future, even the most patient Cubans could become impatient if the standard of living does not improve. U.S. attempts to improve relations with Cuba are threatening because all the Castros and their comrades are taking advantage of the

specter of the 'American Empire.' The threat from the North is used as a justification for all kinds of harassments. But this could change with new President Obama. The Congress of the Communist Party in the fall is likely to send the first signals. Fidel and Ral Castro should try to open Cuba, as former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping did. And Obama could do nothing better than to give up the stubborn resistance of the great United States against the small Cuba during Castro's lifetime."

In the view of Handelsblatt: "What Ral Castro has now done to everybody's surprise can hardly be described as a reshuffle. Castro II, the little brother of Castro I, has used an axe at the Cabinet table and cut those trees which his brother planted and raised. It is a kind of liberation from a stalemate situation, a move of 77-year-old Ral who wanted to free himself from the shadow of his brother Fidel. After one year, the new leader has declared an end to the period of grace for the old Cabinet and the leading figures of Fidel's mercy and took advantage of his own power base. In contrast to domestic policy a new wind will now be blowing in foreign policy. New Foreign Minister Rodriguez is a cool-headed guy with a lot of experience in the international arena. His nomination looks as if Ral Castro is now extending his hand to the arch enemy on the other side of the Streets of Florida."

Die tageszeitung editorialized: "This is the thus far most visible break with Fidel Castro's policy Cuba's President Ral Castro is now removing the most important political personalities whom Fidel Castro had built up. The new direction of the government reshuffle is economic opening with a simultaneous political consolidation. For Havana, the nonsensical U.S. embargo policy was a welcome reason to keep everything as it is. But the reverse is also true that in hardly any other country on the U.S. government's list of opponents could the open diplomacy that Obama proclaimed so quickly create a positive dynamic as in Cuba. This is a chance that Obama should use."

#### 15. Future Strategy on Afghanistan

Under the headline "Karzai Opens The Bag Of Tricks," Berliner Zeitung comments: "The color has been wearing off after five years. The difficult security situation around Kabul, the increasing terror in the provinces, corruption and particularly the rise in crime is greatly frustrating many people. Just to promise things, like in 2004, is no longer enough. To win the elections, Karzai must allow more people to benefit from being in power. This might help him remain in power, but it will not improve the government and it is even counterproductive for the efforts to establish a more effective administration."

#### 16. Attack On Sri Lankan Cricket Team

Under the headline: "Attack On A Holy Institution," Sueddeutsche Zeitung reported; "In Pakistan, the front state in the fight against international terrorism, nothing seems to be safe any longer - not even the national sport cricket, the love of all Pakistanis. The shock in the region sits deep. It is the first time ever that terrorists have attacked a cricket game. It was to have been the first international meeting on Pakistani soil since the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. That is why the meeting was celebrated [everywhere]. And Sri Lanka's cricket association was praised for its courage. This was probably the last time for a long time coming that an international team will dare tour Pakistan."

Frankfurter Allgemeine noted under the headline: "Shots Into The Heart," that "the attack on the Sri Lankan cricket players hits Pakistan at a sensitive point. Islamabad has tried in vain to present itself as a vigorous opponent to terrorists. Now the government must again wonder whether it is taking enough measures against the terrorists in its own country. For weeks, the government has tried to prove to the increasingly worried international community that it is taking serious action against the terrorists in the country, but now skeptics will feel confirmed in their view that Islamabad's measures are insufficient, and partly even counter productive. The most well-known terrorist leaders in Pakistan are still not behind bars. At the same time, government forces have given up their efforts to regain control in the northwestern part of the country."

"Terror Attack On Sri Lanka's Cricket Team," Die Welt reported:  
"Because of the popularity of cricket in South Asia this attack is  
of high symbolic significance and is comparable with a terror attack  
on a national soccer team in Europe."

#### 17. ECB's Reaction to Financial Crisis

In view of the upcoming meeting of the European Central Bank,  
Financial Times Deutschland judged: "In view of the seriousness of  
the crisis, the central bankers should now fully understand the  
seriousness of the crisis and signal their willingness to use all  
possible means to prevent the financial crisis and the recession  
from ending up in a depression. If it does not take action, it will  
worsen the situation on a short term basis, and, in the long run,  
will lose its credibility. But both things would be fatal. Over the  
past few weeks, the ECB has dangerously underestimated the financial  
crisis and the recession. It confused the markets with  
contradictory signals, after long being praised for its ability to  
communicate. Now the ECB must prove that it is not blind on the  
deflation eye. "

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